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AUTHOR Barker, Bruce, O.; Muse, Ivan D.
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ABSTRACT

The study compared nationwide research findings about the districts, superintendents, teachers, programs, and student performance in 642 public school districts with an enrollment of 900 or less to data from a random sample of school districts of similar size in Washington. Data were gathered from superintendents by questionnaire during the 1982-83 school year. Twenty-four of Washington's 107 small/rural school districts, or 96% of those surveyed, responded. Similiar in enrollments but larger geographically than average, Washington's small school districts passed bond issues higher than the national average. Nearly three times as many districts in Washington accepted state aid as did districts nationally. Although no Oregon superintendent held an education specialist degree (compared to 31.5% nationally), over 70% earned $35,000 or more (compared to 37.4% nationally). Teacher salaries were also above average as were teacher/student ratios. Teacher turnover was below average. Graduating seniors performed better than average on the Scholastic Aptitude Test but slightly fewer went on to college and slightly more to technical school. Washington's small school course offerings were at or considerably above national averages in all categories. Sports offerings also compared very favorably as did numbers of resource personnel. (SB)

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ED237301

# A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN WASHINGTON COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
Washington State Department of Public Instruction
November 17, 1983

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by
Dr. Bruce O. Barker
Program Administrator
Division of Continuing Education

Dr. Ivan D. Muse
Professor of Education
College of Education

Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602

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RC014479

Washington

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in Washington enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Twenty-four districts were surveyed in Washington; 642 districts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

# A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN WASHINGTON COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

## INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Washington with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

## METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Washington, 107 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 36.8 percent of the state's 291

operating public school districts and enrolled 45,170 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 25 districts in Washington, of which 24 responded (96.0 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

## FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Washington with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

## CONCLUSION

Washington is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist Washington educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN WASHINGTON AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

| Variable | Washington | Nation |
|---|---|---|
| **The Rural District** | | |
| 1. Average student enrollment per district | 457 | 436 |
| 2. Average number of schools per district | 1.2 | 2.4 |
| 3. Average student enrollment per school | 179.2 | 188.5 |
| 4. Average geographical size of district in square miles | 283 | 245 |
| 5. Percent of student's bussed to school | 70.5 | 64.4 |
| 6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles) | 22.1 | 19.0 |
| 7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts | 72.7 | 24.2 |
| 8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue | $801,152 | $716,000 |
| 9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue | 78.3 | 87.5 |
| 10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments | 17.4 | 36.2 |
| **The Superintendent** | | |
| 1. Average age of superintendent | 46.6 | 47.1 |
| 2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree | 62.5 | 55.4 |
| 3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree | 0 | 31.5 |
| 4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree | 37.5 | 13.1 |
| 5. Average tenure as superintendent (years) | 4.3 | 8.5 |
| 6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000 | 70.8 | 37.4 |
| 7. Percent of full-time superintendents | 75.0 | 75.8 |
| 8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations | 25.0 | 20.9 |
| 9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent | 16.7 | 29.4 |
| **The Teachers** | | |
| 1. Average number of elementary teachers in district | 12.0 | 14.4 |
| 2. Average number of secondary teachers in district | 14.2 | 15.7 |
| 3. Average teacher/student ratio | 1:17.4 | 1:14.5 |
| 4. Percent teacher turnover (1982-83) | 7.5 | 8.6 |
| 5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83) | $13,228 | $12,492 |
| 6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83) | $24,798 | $20,506 |
| 7. Mean current teacher salary (1982-83) | $19,730 | $16,377 |

Table 1 (continued)

| Variable | Washington | Nation |
|---|---|---|
| 8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule | 13.5 | 14.5 |
| 9. Average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers | 3.6 | 3.5 |
| **Student Performance** | | |
| 1. Mean number of graduating seniors | 31.8 | 34.5 |
| 2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists | 0.8 | 1.0 |
| 3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam) | 2.0 | 7.5 |
| 4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam) | 4.3 | 2.6 |
| 5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college | 34.3 | 38.6 |
| 6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school | 14.7 | 14.1 |
| **School Programs** | | |
| 1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel: | | |
| Special Education | 91.7 | 86.6 |
| School Counselor | 79.2 | 79.4 |
| School Psychologist | 58.3 | 33.8 |
| School Nurse | 50.0 | 45.1 |
| Librarian/Media Specialist | 75.0 | 80.9 |
| Adult Education Director | 8.3 | 22.0 |
| Community Education Director | 4.2 | 7.8 |
| Vocational Education Director | 62.5 | 22.0 |
| 2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs: | | |
| Football | 95.8 | 69.2 |
| Basketball | 100 | 100 |
| Baseball | 79.2 | 55.4 |
| Softball | 54.2 | 37.1 |
| Volleyball | 100 | 65.7 |
| Cross Country Track | 25.0 | 23.3 |
| Soccer | 12.5 | 7.0 |
| Wrestling | 37.5 | 25.2 |
| Track and Field | 70.8 | 78.7 |
| Golf | 8.3 | 22.4 |
| Tennis | 8.3 | 16.3 |
| Swimming | 8.3 | 3.2 |
| Gymnastics | 4.2 | 5.9 |

Table 1 (continued)

| Variable | Washington | Nation |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum: | | |
| Spanish | 41.7 | 41.8 |
| German | 25.0 | 9.7 |
| French | 37.5 | 18.9 |
| Calculus | 45.8 | 35.9 |
| Chemistry | 79.2 | 79.4 |
| Computer Science | 70.8 | 60.3 |
| Electronics | 20.8 | 13.0 |
| Vocational Agriculture | 70.8 | 63.1 |
| Physics | 87.5 | 67.7 |

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